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# SPECIAL EVENTS

*The Faculty of Music,  
University of Toronto*

*Concert Hall,  
Edward Johnson Building*

## SMETANA QUARTET

*Jiri Novak - Violin*

*Milan Skampa - Viola*

*Lubomir Kostecky - Violin*

*Antonik Kohout - Cello*

*Thursday, October 13th, 1966*

*8:30 p.m.*

## *Programme*

QUARTET No. 2 IN D MINOR (1882) - - - - Bedrich Smetana (1824-84)

*Allegro*

*Allegro moderato*

*Allegro non più moderato, ma agitato e con fuoco*

*Finale: Presto*

QUARTET No. 4 (1936) - - - - - Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959)

*Allegro poco moderato*

*Allegro scherzando*

*Adagio*

*Allegro*

— I N T E R M I S S I O N —

QUARTET No. 2 ("INTIMATE LETTERS") (1928) - Leos Janacek (1854-1928)

*Andante — Con moto — Allegro*

*Adagio — Poco più mosso — Vivace*

*Moderato — Adagio — Allegro*

*Allegro — Andante — Adagio*

## NOTES

Both Smetana and Janacek used the string quartet as a medium for program music, even for a kind of musical autobiography. Smetana's Quartet No. 1 is subtitled "From My Life", and he intended its four movements to convey prevalent moods from four phases of his personal life-experience. The Quartet No. 2, one of his latest works, is also connected with personal moods—though less specifically. Like Beethoven, Fauré, and Vaughan Williams, Smetana was afflicted with severe loss of hearing in his later years, and his late development is often dependent on his painful struggle with composing under new and limited aural circumstances. In typical romantic fashion he is content to let his frequent despondency leave its mark on the musical expression. Thus he writes to a friend in July, 1882:

I have completed the first movement of the quartet, but as regards the style of this movement I am in somewhat of a quandary; this movement is quite unusual in form and difficult to follow, a kind of conflict dominates it which will, it seems to me, present great difficulties for the players. I feel stunned and sleepy and fear that I am slowly losing the keenness of my musical perception. It seems to me that everything I now work out in my head is veiled as though by a mist of depression and pain.

And, even more revealingly in a catalogue of his works he wrote the following note against the title of this work:

Composed in a state of disordered nerves, the outcome of my deafness.

But in another, later, letter he expresses greater confidence about the Quartet:

The quartet is beginning to fix itself in my mind, so that in any case I shall send it to the printers, for it is good, full of melodious moments, feeling, and novelty.

Thus the work itself alternates in a truly novel way between highly expressive or agitated passages and fresh-sounding dance- or march-like sequences reminiscent of Czech national idioms.

The music of Bohuslav Martinu is more international in outlook than that of either Smetana or Janacek. Though Czech-born, Martinu lived most of his adult life in France and the United States. One of the most fluent and prolific composers of recent times, he produced seven string quartets, of which the fourth was composed in Paris in 1936.

Leos Janacek composed his Quartet No. 1 as a loosely-conceived musical parallel to Tolstoy's novel *The Kreutzer Sonata*. However, his Quartet No. 2 is much more akin to the autobiographical spirit of Smetana: perhaps it would even be better to use here one commentator's term "confessional," since not only is the content regarded by the composer as intimately personal but the music develops correspondingly along quite unique structural patterns. The subtitle of the work is "Intimate Letters." Originally Janacek had written



"Love Letters" on the manuscript title-page, and the viola part he wanted to be played by a viola d'amore. For this was to be an extraordinary musical expression of his love-affair with Madame Kamilla Stösslová, a woman many years his junior. His last completed work, it was composed in a kind of creative fever in about three weeks. The septuagenarian musician wrote to Madame Stösslová in February, 1928:

Our life will be contained in (the Quartet). I shall call it love letters. I think it will sound marvellous. How many treasured experiences we have had together! Like little flames, these will light up in my soul and become the most beautiful melodies. Imagine it! The first piece I have written in memory of Hukvaldy. My impression when I saw you for the first time! Now I am working on the second movement; I think our summer at Luhacovice (Spa) will rise up in that . . . The whole work will be kept together by a special instrument. It is called the viola d'amour — the viola of love. How I am looking forward to it! In this work, I shall be alone with you. No third person besides us . . .

The third and fourth movements of the work are less specifically programmatic than the first two. The viola d'amore part was eventually replaced by a conventional viola, but by calling for frequent *sul ponticello* playing, the composer still evoked the tone of the older instrument. As Colin Mason points out:

Neither in form nor in character do these movements observe any established convention. It is impossible in either of (Janáček's) quartets to speak of a "slow movement" or "scherzo." Every movement has extreme and frequent fluctuations of tempo — though very slow passages are rare.

Folk-like themes and oddly frenzied dance patterns are discernible in some portions of the Quartet, but their expression involves complex rhythmic and scalar procedures that remove them from the area of purely coloristic reference. The third is the most fantastically shaped of the four movements, and in it harkings-back to motives from the first movement are found.